

The Mount Hope Railroad Station

A Brief History Of Roslindale's Mount Hope Railroad Station

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Roslindale, as this part of the city is called, was originally a segment of the Roxbury section of Boston. It was greatly considered the suburbs and a farming district until a burgeoning population started to sprawl outward away from the downtown district.

The area did not become known as Roslindale until 1870 when a post office station was approved by the federal government. Among the names suggested at the time was "South Street Crossing" but that was found improper by postal standards. After meetings of the area residents the name "Roslindale" was adopted.

It is greatly considered by area historians that the name comes from Roslyn, Scotland because the region's greenery and its hills and valleys have a resemblance to that part of Scotland.

Many railroads traveled in and out of Boston in the 19th Century but the larger entity was the Boston and Providence Railroad, which managed several of the branches running southward out of the city. While the Boston and Providence tracks ran geographically in a north-south direction, in railroad terms it was (and remains today) expressed as east (inbound) to west (outbound). It has been this way since the driving of the “Golden Spike” in 1869 at Promontory, Utah when the Central Pacific and Union Pacific Railroads completing the connections from the Atlantic to the Pacific oceans.

This writer does not immediately know it as to when the actual train stop called Mount Hope came into being. However, available imagery of the outbound (westbound) station structure shows a marker stone in the masonry of the building with the inscription “1884 Mount Hope.” At best we can only date the completion of the structure.

According to some rail historians, the station did carry for a while the dual designation of both “Mount Hope” and “Monterey.”

Mount Hope itself is a nearby geographical feature currently topped by Johnswood Road at its highest elevation, and by through traffic on Cummins Highway. When Mount Hope Station was built, Cummins Highway was known as Ashland Street.

The establishment of Mount Hope Station speaks to the sudden population growth the area was going through in those days. While the Boston & Providence RR already had a 2-track right-of-way running through the Roslindale business districts southward to communities such as Needham and Dedham and to points south and west, Mount Hope Station was located on the newer 4-track main line running from Boston, Massachusetts to Providence, Rhode Island. As such it had popularity for travel in both directions.

The 4-track main line was divided up with the outer tracks serving local train stops and the two middle tracks served through-passengers, expresses, and through freight trains.

Today, that same main line still has 3-tracks and serves as a major connection between Boston, Providence, and points beyond including New York City and Washington DC. It is a part of the “Northeast Corridor” and today is populated by both Amtrak and the Massachusetts Bay Transit Authority’s regional commuter trains.

Mouth Hope Station was divided into two parts.

One small ornate building made of brick and stone on its outside walls was built on the outbound side of the line in the late 1800s as the marker stone indicates. The station building was at grade level with the railroad tracks, and a vehicle access dirt road entered the then-industrial area at Florence Street near Sherwood Street and traversed along the edge of Florence Street which was raised at this point to reach the nearby Blakemore Street Bridge crossing above the track level.



Mount Hope Station, Outbound Side, circa 1916

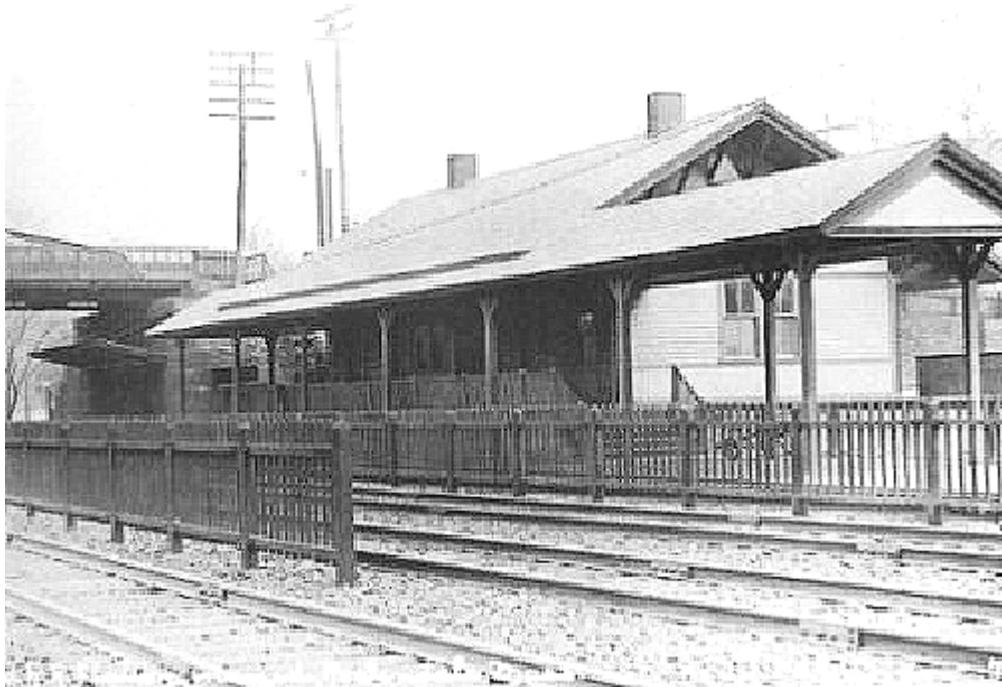


Mount Hope Station Outbound Side (date unknown). The stone marker inset above the bay window says “1884, Mount Hope”. Behind the station a gondola sits on a siding at the F. C. Cunningham Coal Co. The coal grading building had not been built yet.

Adjacent to the station and built later was the F. C. Cunningham Coal Company, later known as the Boston Coal and Ice Company which was a medium-scale coal grading operation that delivered both coal and ice to area homes for heat and food preservation.

At a later date (date unknown) a wooden structure was erected on the inbound side of the line to serve those patrons traveling into Boston. Similarly this station house had a small access driveway to Hyde Park Avenue.

A small wooden pedestrian staircase connected the outbound station house proper to the elevated segment of Florence Street where it connected to Blakemore Street for convenient passenger access. A similar set of stairs accommodated the inbound structure on the Hyde Park Ave side.



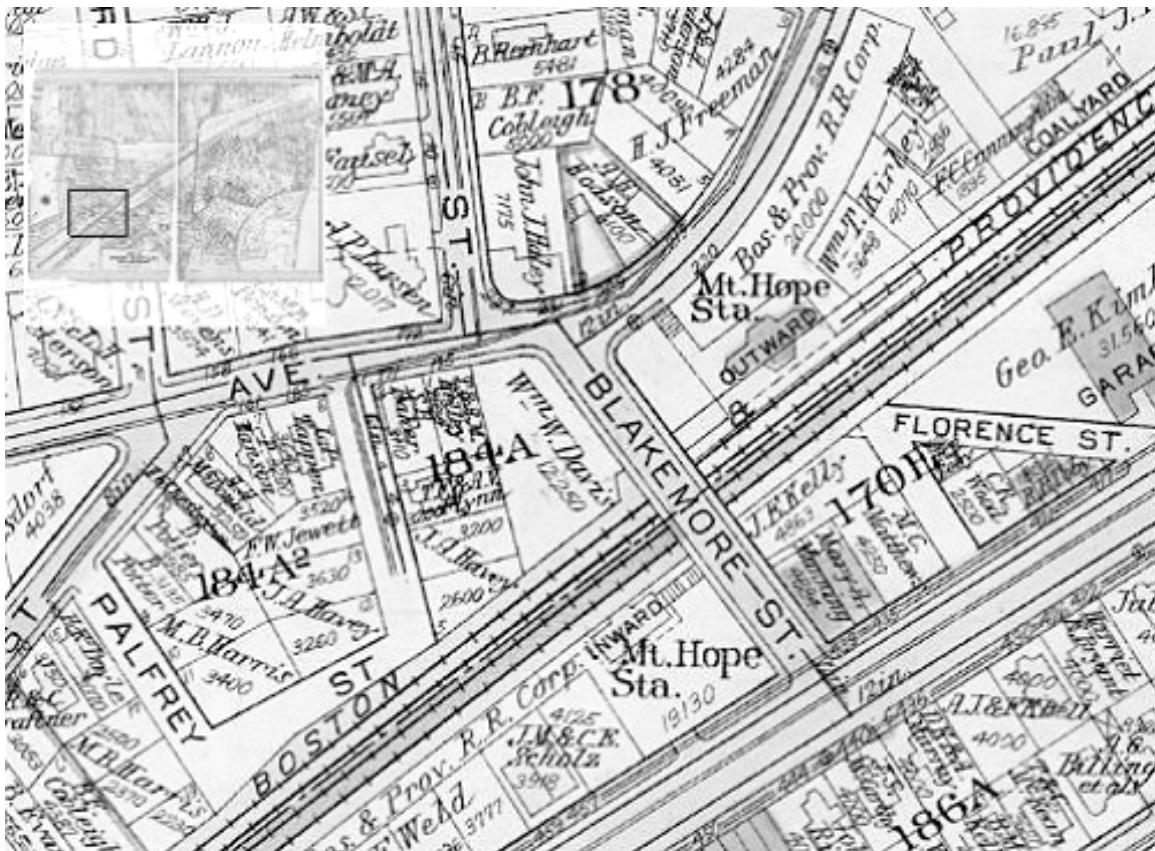
Mount Hope Station – Inbound Side. The rear of the photo is inscribed: "New York, New Haven, and Hartford Railroad - Boston Division, Built 1898, 61' x 23', Removed April 28 1941." Note Blakemore Street Bridge to the rear and the access stairs barely visible behind the building.

Separating the inbound and outbound buildings was the Blakemore Street Bridge that connected Florence Street and Hyde Park Avenue. The bridge was an important feature in that it was the only railroad crossing on the main line available to the south of Forest Hills Junction at approximately the one-mile point.

Blakemore Street, of which the bridge was the sole addressee for many years, was a recent safety addition to the region erected to eliminate the dangers associated with at-grade railroad crossings. Older maps of this area of Roslindale clearly show Florence Street crossing the railroad at track grade near the station as late as 1874, connecting to Hyde Park Ave, and continuing northeastward to Walk Hill Street. Today the former Florence Street from the railroad tracks to Hyde Park Ave. is a driveway to a commercial building. The continuation of the remaining section was renamed and now makes up parts of Florian, Catherine, and Bourne Streets.

Mount Hope Station as a staffed building eventually closed due to a combination of factors, the chief of which was the entry of the United States into World War II. It is generally accepted that it's ticket office (both sides) closed in 1941.

The outbound station house on Florence Street was demolished sometime soon after it was closed (date unknown) but trains continued to stop there for passengers. However, by this time many area residents were taking advantage of the more frequent streetcar (trolley) service from the Boston Street Railway that was available on Washington Street and on Hyde Park Ave.



From www.wardmaps.com - A collector's edition Bromley Map clipping circa 1924 shows Blakemore Bridge connecting Florence Street and Hyde Park Ave. Mount Hope Station's two buildings are shown as "inward" and "outward." Note the reference to Florence Street connecting Hyde Park Ave on the right of the map.

The inbound station suffered a damaging fire due to its vacancy and vandalism and was demolished at an unknown date during the WWII years. Most of the land was absorbed by the City of Boston which erected a small children's playground for area families. Although the wooden structure was gone, the passengers were not, and a small weather enclosure was erected in the inbound station house's location.

Rail passengers continued to board both inbound and outbound trains at Mount Hope Station for many years although the competition from the trolley services and a declining post WWII railroad industry saw fewer and fewer people boarding as time passed. Urbanization eventually brought rail passenger usage of this station to only a few handfuls by the early 1980s.

Service changed over the decades as railroads went out of business or were consolidated. Mount Hope Station was served in its lifetime by the following: Boston & Providence RR, New York-New Haven-& Hartford RR, Penn Central RR, and the Boston and Maine RR, and eventually the MBTA.

In the early 1980s, the MBTA closed the main line railroad and all stations between downtown Boston and the Readville section of Hyde Park for purposes of relocating the rail line from a raised dirt berm in Roxbury into a depressed, below-grade trench. The new railroad segment emerged from the trench just south of Forest Hills and rejoined the present right-of-way south of there at grade level. During the multi-year construction, train traffic from the main line was relocated to a secondary branch line that connected Boston to Readville through Dorchester and Mattapan.

Prior to the main line reopening in the mid-1980s the MBTA, now owner of the rail line, held public hearings on the reopening of Mount Hope Station to rail passengers. Due to the close proximity of Mount Hope to Forest Hills Station and the Orange Line subway service, the MBTA was opposed to reopening Mount Hope. Instead, it offered a limited stop platform approximately one-quarter of a mile south of there at the Cummins Highway crossing. Local opinion at the time declined the offer citing availability of sufficient bus service connecting people to Forest Hills. The decision effectively closed Mount Hope Station and approximately 100 years of service to rail passengers.

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In 1962, the Boston Coal and Ice Company suffered a catastrophic fire that consumed much of the old and dry wooden coal grading structure. Creosote wood preservatives, and decades of embedded coal dust aided in making the fire both spectacular and hard to extinguish, taking close to a week to actually be declared as being completely out.

The land occupied by the coal company and a nearby building supplies warehouse (Whitimore's and later Waldo Brothers) was eventually cleared and remained vacant for some 20 years. The land was eventually rezoned to residential status and is now occupied by the Dale Village Condominium complex.

The land on which the outbound Mount Hope Station existed was held by the MBTA until 2005 and was sold to the Paradigm LLC Developers. As of late 2007 the foundation was being poured for a new 10-unit condo building that will have automobile parking at track level and an entrance onto the raised level of Florence Street.

The land on which the former inbound Mount Hope Station rested, and later occupied by a city playground went into state receivership in the early 1970s when a proposed extension of Interstate Route I-95 was planned to be built from Westwood, Massachusetts into Boston following the railroad right-of-way with an elevated highway structure. That highway project was stopped by then-Governor Francis Sergeant in the early 1970s and the land remained under a development moratorium for some 30 years.

In 2006, the MBTA, conservator of the property on behalf of the State, sold the land to the Urban Edge Development Corporation for purposes of erecting new housing.

As such, the land on which the former Mount Hope Station buildings rested will now be new homes for Roslindale's population that has continued to rise since the community's founding.

While trains no longer stop at Mount Hope, MBTA commuter trains, Amtrak Regional Trains, and the Amtrak high-speed Acela train still ply the tracks, speeding by to serve the needs of modern commuters.

The original 1800s Blakemore Street bridge structure was replaced with a more-modern buttress-style girder and floor beam system in 1950 and continues to be an important railroad crossing one-mile south of Forest Hills, though most commercial traffic uses the Cummins Highway crossing approximately one-quarter mile south of there.

The Blakemore Street Bridge is owned by and maintained by the City of Boston and carries an estimated 9000 vehicles every day. Its official designation by the local railroad industry is Bridge #222.82, indicating that many miles from New York.

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Attachments:

- a) Mount Hope Station – Outbound - circa 1916.
- b) Mount Hope Station, Outbound, date unknown showing “1884 Mount Hope.”
- c) Mount Hope Station, wooden inbound station house.
- d) Ward Maps clip of Bromley Map showing Mount Hope Station locations.

Bibliography:

- 1) Jean K. (Donley) Kirkpatrick, personal interviews. (life-long Roslindale resident)
- 2) Roslindale Historical Society (www.roslindalehistoricalsociety.org) and their content by David and Judith Kuntz.
- 3) Ward Maps (www.wardmaps.com). Historical area maps of Roslindale, various reliefs by G.W. Bromley & Co.
- 4) Gary LaPointe (www.lightlink.com/sglap3/massachusetts/) Internet publication, *Railroads in Massachusetts*; historical data and photographs.

“Ronald Karr’s *Rail Lines of Southern New England* (Pepperell: Branch Line Press, 1995, page 146) lists Mt. Hope (also known as ‘Monterey’) as being at about [mile post] 6.5 from South Station on the original Boston & Providence RR, between Forest Hill and Clarendon Hills stations.”
- 5) Bridge data – www.nationalbridges.com
- 6) Photo 1 (Mt Hope Station January 1916), collection of Gary LaPointe.
Photo 2 (Mount Hope Station-date unknown), collection of Gary LaPointe.
Photo 3 (Mount Hope Eastbound-date unknown) , collection of Gary LaPointe.
Photo 4 (www.wardmaps.com) clipping of a historical Bromley map of Boston.
- 7) Various interviews with regional railroad agencies and personnel.